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The Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network for the UK offer the following response to the consultation document *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Inter Faith Dialogue and Social Action*. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Our response answers the questions set out in it. We would like first, however, to offer some general reflections.

We warmly welcome the recognition in the Secretary of State's Foreword, and in Section 2 of the Introduction, of the important contribution which faith communities make to community life in this country.

We strongly affirm the vision, articulated here by Government, of inter faith activity as a vital tool to build good relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds through interaction and through collaboration in shared activities, with a common purpose and a concrete outcome. We welcome the declared intention to build on the good work which has already been accomplished and is in process and to reflect on how Government should support inter faith activity and how this can make a positive difference to local communities.

We are appreciative of the document's careful recognition that, in inter faith contexts, seeking common ground and shared values is of paramount importance but that, at the same time, the distinctiveness of different faiths and beliefs must be clearly recognised.

We believe that the development of this strategy and the likely boost it will give to inter faith understanding and cooperation is of great importance and can prove to be a gateway to new possibilities.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has four categories of member body: national faith community representative bodies; local inter faith organisations; other inter faith organisations (including English regional faith forums); and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues. As our responses to the questions will show, we believe that all of these organisations have a vital role to play in building

good inter faith relations and helping, through their work, to take forward this important strategy and its implementation. We look forward to engaging with Government on this task.

A list of the Inter Faith Network's Trustees and of its member bodies is at Annex A.

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE  
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT,  
'FACE TO FACE AND SIDE BY SIDE':  
A FRAMEWORK FOR INTER FAITH DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL ACTION**

**SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF  
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF  
THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK**

**1. STRUCTURES WHICH FACILITATE INTERACTION AND SOCIAL ACTION**

**Question 1: Is the balance of structures to facilitate inter faith dialogue and social action at national, regional and local level right?**

We do not think that the 'right' balance between the various structures can easily be stated in general terms, but it is important to ensure that as far as possible there are effective structures at each level and that they complement one another in their work. The Inter Faith Network encourages this approach among its member bodies and other organisations.

The Inter Faith Network's directory, *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK*, mentioned in paragraph 9 of the Introduction to the consultation document, gives a descriptive picture of the inter faith structures which currently exist at UK-wide, national, regional and local level.

There are, as well, structures within Government and other agencies which could be seen as facilitating inter faith dialogue and social action. For example, through its work to encourage and support this, the Cohesion and Faiths Unit of Communities and Local Government (CLG) could be seen as 'facilitative'. So too could personnel within Government Offices and within RDAs as well as within local authorities. As within the inter faith sector, we would offer the reflection that all tiers of government involvement are important and need to interrelate well. The role of the Local Government Association (LGA) is also very important in connecting up the national with the local in terms of encouragement to develop strong local structures and good practice.

The current pattern of 'inter faith' structures, in very general terms, could be described as follows.

In broad terms, nearly 270 local inter faith organisations are now working, around the UK, to encourage and develop respect and understanding between people of different faith traditions and to increase awareness about these. Their work helps build community cohesion by promoting dialogue and social cooperation between

communities. Some of these are bodies which operate on a bilateral or trilateral basis, such as the nearly 50 branches of the Council of Christians and Jews and 8 groups of the Three Faiths Forum, or local groups focusing on other particular relationships, involving for example, Buddhist-Christian, Sikh-Christian, Hindu-Christian or Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

210 of the local organisations are inter faith groups, councils or forums operating on a multi faith basis and working with people from all or most of the major faiths in their areas. In the last 20 years the number of local inter faith organisations operating on a multi faith basis has tripled and new groups are coming into existence every month. *The Local Inter Faith Guide*, published by the Inter Faith Network, is a source of advice for both new and longer standing initiatives. These local bodies vary considerably in their make up, degree of formality, focus of work and degree of engagement with public life issues. Most of these organisations are run by volunteers.

Regional faith forums exist in most English regions but with different emphases within their work and varying degrees of capacity. If these regional bodies are developed and resourced carefully they could all have the capacity to play an extremely important role to support local inter faith structure development where local authorities and local groups seek this (as some already do). They could also help raise the profile of and capacity build, faith based social action projects in their regions (as some already do).

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has a linking, informational and good practice sharing role at national level but also, very importantly, in a cross cutting way across the local, regional and national. This ensures that issues of common concern can be addressed effectively through its meetings and publications and that there can be sharing of good practice. While each region and locality is distinct, members of faith communities are always members of local faith communities but also of their wider faith community at national (and indeed global) level. There is an ongoing need to keep the different levels in conversation so that, for example, national faith community bodies can support and encourage their local members in engaging with inter faith issues in their areas and so that local members can inform national reflection within the faith communities (and indeed beyond).

Among the Inter Faith Network's member bodies are the Scottish Inter Faith Council, the Inter Faith Council for Wales and the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum and this helps to link inter faith work across the UK. The Inter Faith Network carries out, in relation to inter faith work in England many of the roles performed in the rest of the UK by the inter faith linking bodies there. Within England its work involves servicing, with the Faith Based Regeneration Network UK, the newly developing English Regional Faith Forums Network.

The Inter Faith Network also links a range of national inter faith bodies and educational and academic centres which facilitate dialogue and faith/inter faith based social action and a number run programmes which are taken up at local level. Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs), while focusing principally on issues relating to Religious Education in schools, also have a contribution to make at local level to development of inter faith understanding and the Inter Faith Network is currently in discussion with the National Association of

SACREs (one of the Network's member bodies) about a programme of work to explore possible partnership working between local SACREs and local inter faith bodies in England (and possibly also Wales, although discussion has yet to take place with the Welsh Association of SACREs). A recruitment and training initiative, jointly funded by CLG and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), has begun to encourage and support representatives from minority faith communities to serve on SACREs.

There are a number of agencies and initiatives at national, regional and local level which, while not primarily focused on inter faith dialogue and social action, have some programmes which address these. For example, the Diversity and Dialogue project based at the Citizenship Foundation and the 'Sense of Respect' initiative linked to the National Youth Agency. The Inter Faith Network has good engagement with a wide range of these initiatives. There are also, of course, many organisations at all levels which have a focus purely on social action and, in some cases, such as the Faith Based Regeneration Network, specifically faith based social action.

**Question 2: What more is needed at national, regional and local levels to facilitate inter faith interaction and social action?**

We think the following would help to boost inter faith interaction and social action:

a) More opportunities to get involved

- support and resourcing for a national 'inter faith week' which could be used by local faith communities, inter faith organisations, local authorities, schools and in contexts such as workplaces to raise awareness of the importance of good inter faith relations and to draw in more people. Such a week already exists in Scotland and the Inter Faith Network's Executive Committee is currently considering how such a week could be developed and has approached the Department separately about this;
- increased work by third sector and public sector bodies, in partnership with faith and inter faith bodies, to increase opportunities for inter faith engagement;
- The private and public sector being encouraged to develop opportunities for their workforce to get involved in inter faith and intercultural programmes.

b) Development of a strong pattern of complementary working in the inter faith sphere

- encouragement to inter faith bodies to work cooperatively to have the biggest impact;
- continued and increased opportunities for existing faith and inter faith bodies to share information, learn from each others' good practice and develop and maintain effective complementary patterns of work to engage people in the UK in inter faith dialogue and cooperation. Enabling this is one of the key roles of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. Further opportunities at regional level, with increased involvement from regional faith forums, would be desirable;

- a strategy for developing regional level inter faith and multi faith social action work which gives regional faith forums a key role and which, at the same time, ensures this fits well with patterns of local and national faith community engagement in these issues.
- c) Support and resourcing for bodies which promote and develop inter faith interaction and social action
- local authorities encouraged to support local inter faith bodies and projects on a sustainable basis;
  - a central Government programme of grants to help support local inter faith work;
  - national faith community bodies developing, with their local members, materials and programmes to support their local members in inter faith work and possibly pump priming financial support from Government for this purpose;
  - capacity building for faith communities to develop their engagement with social action;
  - more sources of support for national inter faith initiatives and educational bodies which develop programmes to support local inter faith interaction and social action.
- d) Increased training opportunities and support for those working in this field
- development by the Inter Faith Network, with faith communities and other agencies as appropriate, of accredited training for those going into the area of inter faith work. Early discussion on this is already under way;
  - guidance for development workers coming into local inter faith work for the first time. A project on this is already under way, being taken forward by the Inter Faith Network with CDF.
- e) Identification of gaps and careful handling of complex issues
- The Inter Faith Network has a programme of work due to begin in the coming months which will enable discussion of current gaps and tensions within the pattern of dialogue (see answer to question 15)). There will naturally be differing views on complex issues in the inter faith field. It is important to ensure that those embarking on inter faith issues are aware of difficult issues of this kind and of other potential factors which can affect the long term sustainability of initiatives.

**Question 3: Are different approaches required at national, regional and local levels? What might these consist of? What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing?**

We take this question to refer to approaches to facilitating inter faith dialogue and/or faith/multi faith based social action and to achieving the general outcome of a harmonious and just multi faith society. We think that many of the approaches will be the same at all levels in terms of basic principles of engagement and sensitivity on faith and inter faith issues. All member bodies of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

have endorsed the guidance in its statement on *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*.

A detailed review of the roles of all the different players would be beyond the compass of this response. But, in broad terms, we see the roles as follows:

Government:

- finding ways to help faith communities to engage well with processes of consultation and policy making at national, regional and local level;
- working to ensure that all sectors of society are well educated in inter faith and intercultural issues and that these discussions are seen as of high importance;
- working in partnership with faith and inter faith bodies (where appropriate) to help develop programmes to increase understanding between faith communities and between faith communities and wider society and also to increase ‘religious literacy’ on the part of the public sector;
- ensuring that different strands of its own work interconnect well – for example continuing to deepen the working relationship between CLG and DCFS and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to enable inter faith understanding and dialogue issues to be tackled jointly where they are cross cutting.

It will be important in terms of central Government’s role for there to be clarity about the respective roles of Government departments and also of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission with its ‘good relations’ role.

Faith communities:

- working to put their values into effect in social action which benefits all;
- contributing to the public sphere through a range of different routes at national, regional and local level;
- Educating their followers about the importance of good inter faith relations and providing resources to help them to be firmly rooted in their own faith but also to develop competence and skills to build bridges of understanding and friendship between communities.

Faith based organisations:

We assume that this refers to bodies such as charitable agencies with a faith basis. We would see them as:

- contributing generally to social wellbeing;
- having a role in developing an inter faith strand to their work or working in coalition with comparable agencies rooted in other faith traditions (eg the joint working of various faith based international aid agencies).

Non faith-based organisations:

Secular agencies or bodies are so various that it is hard to comment on their role other than to acknowledge that many run relevant programmes and more can be encouraged to do so. We would, however, like to make the point that we are not keen to see secular agencies running ‘religious literacy’ or inter faith programmes where faith community organisations are not fully involved in the development of these and, where appropriate, are suitably reimbursed for their involvement.

### Inter faith organisations:

Inter faith organisations at local, regional and national level have a key role because they:

- bring together groups or individuals from different faiths for purposes of dialogue or multi faith projects but also stimulate wider engagement in inter faith issues
- can be living symbols of inter faith interaction and cooperation and catalysts for wider change within society, developing resources and widening the inter faith skill and knowledge base within faith communities and more widely.

### Wider civil society:

It is not possible to comment except in unhelpfully general terms on the role of wider civil society. However, there is a need for wider society, and especially the media, to take seriously the sincerity of religious people and, without having to agree with them, not to caricature them.

## **2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING WHICH BUILD UNDERSTANDING**

### **Question 4: Are there appropriate opportunities in your community and your local area to learn about different faiths and beliefs?**

We think that local bodies are best placed to respond to this question. However, as noted elsewhere in this response, national and regional bodies can assist in enabling opportunities locally.

The question uses the term ‘community’ which, of course, is not only relevant to a local geographic catchment. It is also important that each faith community affords opportunities for learning and engagement at all levels.

Schools and colleges have great strategic potential for providing opportunities for learning about and learning from different faiths and beliefs in and for every community – both directly with pupils and, through them, with parents and grandparents.

### **Question 5: How do we improve opportunities for learning about different religions and beliefs and build on existing best practice?**

We would like to answer this important question but also to address a related question of how we can improve opportunities for learning not just about different religions and beliefs but also about the importance of inter faith understanding and cooperation.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK includes among its member bodies the Religious Education Council for England and Wales and the National Association of SACREs and we think that they are best placed to offer comment on this question in a schools context. The Network has consistently urged that the best opportunities possible should be available for students of all backgrounds in schools and colleges of further education to learn both about the individual faith traditions and about inter faith issues

as should good quality material and teaching resources and has welcomed the greater recognition of the importance of this in the context of RE syllabuses. The context of Citizenship Education is also relevant for this. The new duty on schools to promote cohesion will provide new and important opportunities for greater learning of this kind within the wider school context.

People training to become clergy or religious or lay leaders in the different faith communities need to acquire at least basic knowledge about other religions and beliefs and to be able to engage sensitively with inter faith issues. We would like to see a programme of work to encourage seminaries and other relevant training organisations within faith communities to develop suitable modules.

Please see also our response to question 8 which overlaps with question 5.

**Question 6: How best can different faith communities work together whilst retaining their distinctiveness?**

Through the kind of principles outlined *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs* (Attached at Annex B) and through developing clear protocols for working with other faith communities which ensure that staff engaged in cross faith working are aware of the issues involved in this; and that they are able courteously and appropriately to make clear their own faith's position on particular matters but not to cross over into targeted proselytism or, at the other extreme, feel they have to misrepresent or conceal their own key beliefs.

There is a more general question which we would also like to address and that is what it means to talk about 'faith communities' working together and how best they can do so. The term 'faith community' can refer to the totality of members of a particular faith in an area or in the UK (or even globally). In real terms, it is not 'faith communities' but, rather, particular individuals of different faiths or particular faith-based organisations that work together on a programme or project. Although issues of 'distinctiveness' are certainly important, what is often crucial to joint working is discernment of the shared values which can underpin cooperative working, together with a careful agreement about how leadership and decision making take place within a shared project. Joint working by faiths on social or religious issues is very important but it is challenging, complex and requires a high level of additional care and input on the part of all involved.

**Question 7: How can the lessons learned and experienced gained from inter faith dialogue and social action help to build relationships with people from different communities more widely?**

At the heart of work in this area is the development of skills relating to communication across cultural backgrounds and working to handle difference but to identify and build on commonalities. This has a broad application.

The Inter Faith Network's code, *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*, distils some of the key principles and guidelines which its member

bodies think are vital for positive inter religious encounter. It has also been used in other, non-religious, contexts because of the usefulness of its basic guidance on effective engagement across boundaries of belief and practice.

It would be useful for the new Equality and Human Rights Commission to ensure that its staff have training in dialogue skills and that these skills are built into its education and good relations work. This would include skills that have been successfully deployed in inter faith contexts. This will enable lessons that have been learned in the inter faith sector to be transferred broadly across the areas the Commission covers.

**Question 8: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in building understanding about different beliefs and practices?**

[NB Our responses to Questions 3 and 5 are also relevant here as the questions overlap.]

Government:

Ensuring:

- appropriate content, delivery and resourcing for RE in schools and also for Citizenship Education insofar as inter faith issues may also be addressed within this;
- suitable level of continual professional development for those in RE and Citizenship Education;
- availability of suitable courses also in Further and Higher Education institutions.

Encouraging:

- development in a range of sectors of appropriate educational materials;
- local authorities to develop strong programmes of work on cohesion which incorporate a clear goal of building better understanding between local faith and cultural groups and which draw well on the expertise of the local inter faith body and the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education to do so.

Faith communities and faith based organisations:

- developing their own educational materials about their faith which are designed to help those outside their community to develop greater understanding of it. It is important that such materials are written by authors skilled in understanding the beliefs of others and therefore able to express their own communities' beliefs in ways which will be understood by others, explaining carefully any non-English terms; and that these materials not be of a proselytising nature.
- contributing to the development of RE and diversity training materials;
- contributing to radio, television and new media coverage of faith and inter faith issues.

Non faith based organisations: Bodies such as the BBC, which has developed a useful and extensive section on its website on religion and ethics, can play a key role.

The media as a whole should be encouraged to cover religious issues effectively and responsibly.

Inter faith organisations:

- contributing to the development of RE and diversity training materials, in careful consultation with the relevant faith communities.
- contributing to radio, television and new media coverage of faith and inter faith issues.
- running events, talks and training sessions.

Note: The question, as put, is quite general in that it asks about ‘building understanding about different beliefs and practices’. This could cover a wide span of beliefs, from religious to non-religious and, within the ‘religious’, historic to newer traditions. Depending on the make up or emphasis of an organisation, it may choose to promote understanding about particular parts of this spectrum. For example, a national faith community representative body of one faith would be highly unlikely to wish to reshape its mission and charitable aims to play a general role in educating the public (or its own followers) about all religions and new religious movements as part of its work. There will be an understandable and appropriate focus on its own tradition, even where it is also strongly committed to building good inter faith relations. By contrast, a multi faith forum with a wide range of faiths and beliefs involved might choose to include material on its website, or point site users to other relevant resources, covering all religions and beliefs currently practised in Britain. Academic centres and educational bodies may be best placed to research and disseminate material on the most wide-ranging basis, relating to all religious beliefs and practices, including variation within communities. An example would be the University of Derby/Multi Faith Centre publication, *Religions in the UK: A Directory*.

### **3. SHARED SPACES FOR INTERACTION AND SOCIAL ACTION**

#### **Question 9: What spaces are being used by faith communities for inter faith dialogue and social action?**

Organisations use a range of spaces for their events. It is important to find venues which make participants feel at ease. Schools and council buildings are common venues for use by these types of body and, in the case of small inter faith dialogue groups, also members’ homes.

Some have found that, particularly, in the early days of a new initiative, when members of inter faith bodies or projects are as yet without a strong sense of each other’s views and sensitivities, it can be helpful to meet on ‘neutral ground’ at venues such as community centres or town halls. However, a number of local inter faith bodies meet at faith community venues but rotate the venue to avoid undue identification with one particular faith tradition and to ensure that a wider sense of ownership and involvement can develop. When using faith community venues, there is a need to be aware of some possible sensitivities. It is important for participants to be aware just where the ‘sacred’ or explicitly religious area of a faith community’s

building may be and which parts are considered, by contrast, as appropriate for ordinary meetings.

### **Question 10: What barriers are there to sharing spaces?**

In terms of 'faith spaces', there can be barriers because of some areas being inappropriate for general use (being seen as 'sacred'). Or there can, for example, in some faiths be restrictions on areas where women can go or on where participants can enter unless dressed appropriately.

Spaces where there are bars serving alcohol can be difficult to use on a shared basis where there are participants whose religious beliefs make this unacceptable.

Sometimes, use of lottery money for a building can make it controversial. For example, at the Greenwich Millennium Dome, a separate Muslim prayer room was built outside of the Dome and with funding raised through an alternative route partly because of this.

Absence of suitable facilities in common spaces can make them less likely to be shared. For example, a leisure area with no *halal* food provision would not encourage observant Muslims to socialise with people of other backgrounds. Absence of vegetarian food would have a comparable impact on many Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and others.

There are, of course, particular issues relating to sharing prayer or worship space, ranging from whether or not it is appropriate to have faith symbols of different faiths present continually in a shared space; types of seating needed where there are different traditions about use of these; the presence of any pictorial imagery (unacceptable to some faiths); availability of washing facilities; issues over whether a space is suitable for congregational use or only individual use; timetabling of use, etc. But this is a topic which would require a much longer and more detailed response.

It is also important to consider a linked but somewhat different issue of spaces/times when faith groups and leaders come together in ceremonies such as Remembrance Sunday and other national/local ceremonies. This is not purely a 'space' issue in that there are theological issues which shape how and when this can happen and what sort of joint observances are possible. These are explored briefly in the Government's document *Working Together: Cooperation Between Government and Faith Communities* (Home Office, 2006). But there are 'space issues' – such as what type of space is appropriate to use for Remembrance Sunday or for Holocaust Memorial Day. Can places of worship be used? Are secular venues more appropriate? Further work on this important issue is desirable but it comes under the more general area of handling of 'civic religion' issues and may fall outside the scope of this particular consultation.

**Question 11: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to create shared spaces?**

Government:

Many spaces we share are in the public domain: schools; restaurants; transport. Government and relevant agencies can help to ensure that the needs of users of different faith backgrounds are taken into account. Suitable catering facilities and washing facilities are very important.

Faith communities and faith based organisations:

These can help by making their premises (or the appropriate parts of these) open for use by people of other backgrounds, subject to a clear understanding about terms and conditions of use.

Inter faith organisations:

These can assist through, for example, working on guidelines for shared use by people of different backgrounds of particular spaces, ranging from shared prayer spaces through to leisure facilities. Where such organisations have suitable premises they can make these available for wider use.

#### **4. CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS TO BRIDGE AND LINK**

**Question 12: Access to funding, leadership skills, and misconceptions about the role of faith in public life have all been recognised as issues which can limit the ability of faith communities to bridge and link. Are there other barriers in your community or local area which need to be overcome? Who needs to take action, and what do they need to do?**

We think that local bodies are best placed to respond to this question.

However, we would add that some capacity building for faith groups to engage well with building community cohesion remains important where these are acutely understaffed and yet called on regularly to assist in consultations. So too does training for those in the public sector to increase their religious literacy and also greater clarity about appropriate funding for faith-based bodies working on service delivery or special projects (about which, as the Commission on Integration and Cohesion noted, there seems to be some hesitation within local authorities).

**Question 13: To what extent does inter faith social action in your local area enable you to work side by side with people who have no religious belief? How might social action involving faith communities and wider civil society be increased and strengthened?**

We think that local respondents are best placed to respond to the first part of this question.

On the second part of the question, there is already a great deal of joint working between faith based and secular organisations. Indeed, there is more cooperative social action across this divide than there are examples of projects restricted to multi faith cooperation, as distinct from single faith based projects. Clearly the climate would be helped by steps to increase mutual understanding and respect between religious and secular perspectives within society, but many religious people work in secular organisations. Shared values can, as the Millennium Act of Commitment by the faith communities (quoted in paragraph 1.5 of the consultation document) implied, help positive engagement between religious people and those of no religious beliefs work together towards the common good.

**Question 14: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to increase the level and scope of inter faith social action?**

The term ‘inter faith social action’ is used in this question and, in this context we have the following reflections, which are about possible action rather than just ‘roles’:

Government could:

- incentivise joint projects;
- gather or commission the gathering of information about where in the UK (and further afield) such joint projects are happening and how they are working.

Faith communities and faith-based organisations could

- hold, together, a national level conference to explore the barriers to date to joint working and the possibilities for future joint action. (This could link up with the suggestion above relating to Government).

Hospital and prison chaplaincy offer additional important contexts for promoting inter faith engagement.

Inter faith organisations:

- local inter faith bodies could be encouraged to develop small scale local projects, such as environmental ones, to encourage joint working between faiths;
- inter faith organisations and, possibly also secular agencies such as the EHRC, could develop youth social action summer camps to encourage young people of different religious and cultural backgrounds to work cooperatively. This

could encourage them to work in similar ways in their later professional careers.

**Question 15: How are you promoting and encouraging inter faith activity and sharing best practice? What are the best ways of encouraging more people to take part? What role might Government play to champion this?**

The member bodies of the Inter Faith Network are, in their various ways, carrying out relevant programmes of activity about which they are best placed to respond individually.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK itself:

- links, shares good practice between, and supports with advice and information the growing pattern of inter faith initiatives in the UK at national, regional and local levels;
- assists member organisations and other agencies, such as local authorities and other public bodies, to help strengthen their inter faith programmes and good practice;
- provides a trusted neutral, non-denominational framework for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern, reflecting on both the distinctive aspects and the common ground of their individual traditions;
- in cooperation with the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh national inter faith linking bodies and the English regional faith forums, fosters local inter faith co-operation and offers advice on patterns of local inter faith initiatives suitable to particular local area as well as helpful contacts;
- fosters joint working by the faith communities on social issues and arranges seminars and conferences and carries out research to pursue particular issues in greater depth, such as building good relations on campus, educating for shared citizenship, and women's inter faith initiatives;
- helps raise public awareness about inter faith issues to encourage more people to get involved and runs a helpline and publishes resources to help people working to promote good inter faith relations;
- works with member organisations and other agencies to increase the opportunities for people of all ages to learn more about the importance of good inter faith relations – in schools, within faith communities and in society more widely.

At the Inter Faith Network's National Meeting and AGM in 2007, in the context of reflections on the Network's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, participants looked at the rapidly changing inter faith landscape of the UK. Their discussions underlined the extent to which the issues and the 'players' in every sector of this area of work are shifting and evolving. The Inter Faith Network works on a continual basis to keep up to date with developments and to discuss these with its members: both in terms of the impact of these on their work but also in terms of the overall pattern of the work and membership of the Network. The Inter Faith Network's 'category' meetings for different types of member body and its Executive Committee and National meetings do provide an opportunity to take stock of these issues but there is arguably a need for more in depth discussion of them. The Executive

Committee has recently started planning for a 'Soundings' programme: a two year programme of consultative meetings running from April 2008 to March 2010, which will be looking at particular issues in greater depth. These will help inform the Inter Faith Network's own work and development but they will also have a wider value – giving participants an opportunity to talk through some of the issues affecting their organisations directly and to share good practice and discuss potentially fruitful areas of joint work. Just a few of the topics which may be explored at these 'by invitation' meetings and seminars include: the development of further opportunities for dialogue between the Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Sikh, faiths and between these and other faiths (currently an under represented area of dialogue by comparison to that involving the 'Abrahamic faiths'); the emerging rich but complex pattern of organisational opportunities for dialogue work between 'Abrahamic faiths'; patterns of engagement between the faith communities directly linked by the Inter Faith Network and other traditions; dialogue between religious groups and wider society and between 'religious' and 'non-religious'; interrelationships and fruitful joint working between the work of Standing Advisory Councils of Religious Education and local inter faith structures; devolution and English regionalisation and their impact on faith communities and inter faith working: opportunities and challenges; young people and inter faith dialogue – patterns of work in the field; women and inter faith activity. The exact scope and nature of the programme is subject to further development and the securing of necessary funding.

In order to encourage more people to take part in inter faith activity, we suggest:

- an annual inter faith week (as noted above under Question 2, the Inter Faith Network trustees are currently considering plans for such a week);
- increased focus on learning at school age, both within schools and youth organisations, of skills for dialogue engagement;
- all national faith community representative bodies (with the help, if possible and if they wish, of pump priming Government project grant support) to establish, where they have not done so already, formal programmes to support inter faith work with a paid worker who could assist in development of materials and visit local faith group members to encourage them to participate in inter faith activity;
- small grants programme for a wide programme of 'taster' events to be run by local inter faith bodies;
- all local inter faith bodies to be given grants to develop a simple website and training in how to maintain this;
- regional faith forums to be supported/encouraged to develop online information about opportunities for involvement in their regions and to support local inter faith bodies in maintaining clear and up to date websites with 'events' sections;
- making inter faith events fun. Faith communities to be encouraged to take part in joint events like the cricket or football matches;
- ensuring that the Cultural Olympiad has an inter faith component built into it.

## **THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INTER FAITH ACTIVITY EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Question 16: How might the barriers experienced by women be overcome?**

This is a complex issue for the reasons outlined in the report the Inter Faith Network for the UK commissioned in 2006 from Dr Fatheena Mubarak. Some useful strategies might include:

- seeking to ensure that, whenever possible, women of the different faiths are represented in appropriate numbers at events and that they are also reflected adequately within committee and inter faith leadership structures;
- where women do not feel they can/wish to be actively involved in mixed gender meetings, consider having women-only activities;
- run skill development programmes for women of different faiths in areas such as media literacy; meeting facilitation; and mediation.

### **Question 17: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society in overcoming these?**

- encourage faith communities to involve more women at senior level in lay or religious leadership roles (options will vary from community to community) so that these can be nominated to play a role in inter faith forums.

Note: Gender ‘quotas’ for inter faith committees are not necessarily the right way forward if these might mean that a local faith forum has to choose between involving more women or involving particular religious leaders who would be likely to be crucial to the success of the initiative in question. This kind of ‘either/or’ situation would not necessarily arise in the context of events or projects but it is a not uncommon dilemma where committees are supposed to be ‘representative’ of the key faiths in an area and to involve senior leadership. If so, the key is to widen the pool of women within faith communities in leadership positions.

### **Question 18: How might the barriers experienced by young people be overcome?**

- increased opportunities for involvement of an appropriate kind.
- better training for young people who would like to be involved.
- start a UK equivalent to the US based ‘Inter Faith Youth Corps’. (See <http://www.ifyc.org/>)

**Question 19: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society in overcoming these?**

Government:

- making funding programmes available which encourage existing inter faith bodies and faith communities to draw young people into this work;
- ensuring that in RE and Citizenship Education there are opportunities to learn about and become interested by inter faith issues.

Faith communities and faith based organisations:

- arranging ‘twinning’ and joint projects where young people of different faiths can get involved in projects together;
- student religious organisations and chaplaincies can work to increase opportunities for dialogue and engagement on campus.

Non-faith based organisations:

- youth organisations could work with inter faith organisations and faith communities to develop special programmes of work. For example, the Inter Faith Network worked with the National Youth Agency and TimeBank on its youth inter faith action guide *Connect: Different Faiths, Shared Values*.
- Institutions of Further and Higher Education can encourage inter faith interaction on campus.

Inter faith organisations:

- they could run more youth focused inter faith programmes. Some are already doing good work in this area but more could be encouraged to do so. They can also support projects, such as those on universities campuses, where young people are being encouraged to come together for dialogue.
- as noted at the question above, developing an initiative on the lines of the US based Inter Faith Youth Corps would be worth exploring.

**Question 20: What can successful existing approaches tell us about the key building blocks needed for inter faith dialogue and social action?**

If this question means in what sense can current approaches serve as models for future work, clearly there is a range of good approaches which can. The Inter Faith Network for the UK has a key role in the sharing and promotion of good practice and its member bodies each have stories to tell and, in many cases, projects and programmes to offer which can be resources for developing future work.

**Please include any others comments you might wish to make here:**

1. Starting from a positive place

- 1.1 We recognise that inter faith dialogue and social action have an important role to play, through building on positive relations and breaking down barriers, in efforts to build cohesion and resilience to extremism within communities in all

its forms (Introduction, Paragraph 7). However, we are particularly keen that thinking about dialogue and cooperation not start from the place of fear and response to threat. Its first starting place should be positive – the desire to increase mutual understanding and respect as a basis for a fuller contribution to wider society. We are pleased that this contribution is recognised at paragraph 1.14. In this context it is vitally important to sustain work on developing this mutual understanding and respect through inter faith work which is not any less significant than the encouragement of practical cooperation in joint social action.

## 2. Flexible planning and room for local variety

2.1 Clearly, it is important that the strategy which emerges from this consultation should avoid being too prescriptive. There are many different and equally valid ways to carry forward inter faith dialogue and social action. We would not want to see, for example, a rigid template that prescribed just one way that a regional forum could operate or just one model for local inter faith councils or faith forums. It is certainly always helpful for sharing of good practice and emulating of worthwhile models and a degree of orderliness is always welcome! However, an element of flexibility is crucial.

2.2 We note the Prime Minister's desire, referred to in the Secretary of State's Foreword, to see increased dialogue and inter faith councils in all areas. This is very positive and we share his conviction about the importance of local inter faith bodies. However, we are cautious about any potential 'one size fits all' approach which could envisage all of them being of the same kind and with identical functions. There is, as the Department will be aware, presently a broad spectrum of types of local inter faith councils, forums and groups. They vary considerably in their structures, degree of formality and patterns of work and are, for the most part, independent bodies run mainly by volunteers. Whatever way forward is sought by Government on local inter faith bodies, it will be important to consider carefully:

- what the purposes are of working towards local inter faith structures in every area;
- what might, desirably, be their pattern of work;
- whether all local inter faith councils or forums need to be broadly similar in their pattern of work or whether some may, as at present, continue to focus more on inter faith dialogue and learning and others lean more toward the agenda of engagement of local faith communities with public life issues;
- what the circumstances of particular areas require;
- whether there needs, in all cases, to be a formal relationship with the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership;
- how local inter faith bodies will fit with new local frameworks which might emerge in the context of the work of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission;
- how local inter faith bodies will be resourced so that they can operate more effectively and develop their work;

- how to encourage existing bodies to develop broader patterns of work, where necessary, without seeking to impose a ‘top down’, Government driven agenda which could lead local people to feel a lack of ownership of their own inter faith initiatives.

### 3. Balanced and appropriate forms of partnership

- 3.1 It is helpful that the consultation is framed in terms of a reflection on possibilities for partnership. The roles of Government and of faith communities are different ones. There needs, as Government recognises, to be shared ownership of the process and an appropriate recognition of the independence of faith communities and of their expertise on faith and inter faith issues as well, of course, as the interest of wider society in ensuring good engagement of faith communities in this and good inter faith relations.
- 3.2 The overarching framework for implementation for the vision outlined in this document is ‘partnership’: involving ‘faith communities; faith and non-faith based organisations; inter faith organisations and government – at national, regional and local levels’ (Section 2, paragraph 2.2). Partnership is certainly a desirable principle but there is a need to be careful that this not be an unequal partnership where the powerful hand of government and secular agencies – however well motivated – accidentally crushes the hand of the faith groups or inter faith bodies it reaches out to shake. For example, if a local authority sees local inter faith bodies or faith groups principally in terms of the role that faith communities can play in delivering on *their* agenda, the local authority may then look for partnership models which lead faith communities or inter faith bodies to be seen simply as ‘delivery mechanisms’ for the secular social agenda. An instrumentalising engagement of this kind would distort the work of the faith group and lead to difficulties, in the long term, for the local authority.
- 3.3 Likewise, while it is helpful if local inter faith structures can feed into Local Strategic Partnerships and act as appropriate sounding boards on local issues, it would be counterproductive to make, in all cases, this particular type of partnership role their starting point or the key dimension of their partnership.
- 3.4 We do not wish in any sense to criticise the idea what we should all be partners in improving society; but simply to sound a note of caution that partnerships should respect the ethos and commitments of religious people, who will want to work in ways which reflect their own understandings and beliefs.

### 4. Words matter

- 4.1 We agree with the Government’s use of the term ‘inter faith activity’ (Introduction para 5) to ‘express meaningful interactions between people from different faith communities’ and understand why the Government has chosen to use it also to cover interactions between ‘faith communities and wider civil

society’. However, we would argue that the latter type of relationship is not ‘inter faith’ if it refers to interaction between people of faith and those within civil society who do not consider themselves to be religious. This vital interaction between faiths and wider civil society might better be referred to in terms of ‘faith and society’ relationships or, in some contexts, ‘interaction between religious and non religious people’.

- 4.2 A linked issue is that where ‘inter faith’ is taken to include those who do not see themselves as religious this can be assumed, unreflectively, to mean that ‘inter faith councils’ are expected to include both religious and non-religious groups. While a few local inter faith bodies may opt to be inclusive of those of non religious beliefs this is not usually the case. It is entirely legitimate for faiths to wish to engage in dialogue and to work together on a ‘cross-faith’ basis and to engage with wider society through separate means.
- 4.3 Also, in relation to the term ‘inter faith’, we note that traditionally, the terminology of ‘multi faith’ or simply ‘faith’, rather than ‘inter faith’, has been used to describe projects or consultations where separate faiths are brought together for purposes of consultation or joint action on particular projects where the primary purpose is not inter faith understanding *per se*. Or sometimes, just ‘faith’ is used. So, for example, it is not uncommon to find bodies referred to as ‘multi faith partnerships’ or ‘faith forums’ where joint social working and consultation is the only or primary purpose.
- 4.4 Quite a number of bodies at national, regional and local level, undertake both multi faith, ‘side-by-side’, working and also inter faith, ‘face to face’, work. In this situation, quite a number of organisations (including the Inter Faith Network for the UK) do choose to use the overall term ‘inter faith’ in the broad sense which Government is deploying in its consultative document. But it is important to be aware that for some faith groups – and particularly those nervous of inter faith interaction – the terminology can seem off-putting if it suggests that primacy is always to be given within a project to interaction rather than joint working.

## 5. Funding patterns and their long term impact

- 5.1 We welcome the Government’s commitment to developing an effective inter faith strategy, with partners, and to resourcing (and encouraging others also to resource) this. Clearly, it will be very important that possible impacts of particular types of funding pattern are evaluated carefully to maximise the likelihood of clear and effective patterns of inter faith interaction and cooperation.
- 5.2 If RDAs are to be encouraged to support regional faith forums it will be important that there be a degree of consistency between regions and that there is a danger that less fundable ‘face-to-face’ work does not get left behind with RDAs being more interested in focusing on faith based social action and faith group input to regional governance and economic issues.

5.3 There is a real dilemma where short term funding is made available for inter faith organisations. The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund helped a number of excellent initiatives get off the ground and enabled other, existing bodies, to develop their work; but when short term funding stops, rather as plants wither in hot sun when the irrigation is shut off, some initiatives wither even before flowering. In the case of the recent FCCBF funding, a number of development workers who had just learned the ropes have had to be laid off just as they are coming to their most effective work. Short term funding should, ideally, be reserved for projects and events, and there should be, wherever possible, three year funding for work where a post is involved in accordance with the Government's general assurances to the third sector.

5.4 There are currently a number of cross cutting funding strands within Government. We recognise that this is to some degree unavoidable but think that it would be very helpful if there could be greater interaction between Departments to try to ensure that they are not funding mutually incompatible strands of inter faith and faith based social action work at regional and local level or double supporting particular areas.

## 6. Media

6.1 We think that the very important role of the media should be considered in the context of building good inter faith relations. We would like to see:

- More coverage on television and radio of inter faith relations – and in particular more of the positive stories;
- Consistently responsible reporting within the press (and in particular the national press) of faith issues.

## 7. Local/Regional/National/UK/Global

7.1 Inter faith issues are relevant at every level and now that we are connected at every level through the internet and mobile technology, there is a need also to think about how inter faith relations and cooperation are carried forward using these means;

7.2 We have a concern about the increasing traffic of inflammatory round robin emails attacking particular faiths' views and websites which foster intolerance and hatred. These need to be addressed or for many young people they will continue to represent a source of poisonous negativity undercutting the good work of educators, faith communities and others to encourage respectful learning and engagement.

## 8. The pros and cons of professionalisation

8.1 Traditionally, the world of inter faith relations has been strongly volunteer driven and supported – just like the world of faith communities. But demands

being made on the time of faith community members to take part in consultations and give advice grow ever greater. And while it is welcome that society at large seems keener to involve faith communities on a range of fronts, it poses some real problems for those seeking to do this work on top of full time jobs.

- 8.2 There is, therefore, a move within local inter faith structures to seek paid staff. This can be very desirable but it brings with it new challenges - incipient bureaucracy and small groups finding themselves in the tangled forest of employment legislation and legal obligations; getting to grips with how to hire and support people; and managing the change process of making the transition from trustee led and run bodies to trustee governed bodies with staff implementing the work.
- 8.3 It would be helpful, while not holding up funding, to have some careful analysis work done on half a dozen local inter faith bodies in multi faith towns and cities to explore the dynamics of change and see what is working and what is not before moving to champion particular models for local inter faith bodies.

## 9. Careful planning and solid delivery

- 9.1 Many people are currently working at full throttle on the various important strands of work being developed to build good inter faith relations in the UK at every level. This work needs to be taken forward at a measured and sustainable pace with adequate consultation time; suitably long funding and delivery timetables; attention to retaining and growing expertise on the issues; and due care to avoid duplication and undercutting caused by initiative overlaps.

## 10. Wider legislative and social framework

- 10.1 It is our view that good inter faith relations can only flourish within a just and respectful society where people of different faiths feel that they are valued contributors to society. Therefore, measures to increase good inter faith relations need always to be assessed in this broader societal context.

6 March 2008

## Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

### Faith Community Representative Bodies

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)  
 Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom  
 Board of Deputies of British Jews  
 British Muslim Forum  
 Buddhist Society  
 Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland  
 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland  
 Churches Together in England  
 Committee for Other Faiths, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
 Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)  
 Friends of the Western Buddhist Order  
 Hindu Council (UK)  
 Hindu Forum of Britain  
 Imams and Mosques Council (UK)  
 Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London  
 Jain Samaj Europe  
 Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)  
 Muslim Council of Britain  
 National Council of Hindu Temples  
 Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)  
 Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)  
 Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations  
 Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB  
 Swaminarayan Hindu Mission  
 Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Interfaith Subcommittee  
 Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
 World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League  
 World Islamic Mission (UK)  
 Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

### Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum  
 Scottish Inter Faith Council  
 Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru

East of England Faiths Council  
 Faiths Forum for the East Midlands  
 Northwest Forum of Faiths  
 South East of England Faiths Forum  
 South West Council of Faiths  
 West Midlands Faiths Forum  
 Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum

Alif Aleph UK  
 Christian Muslim Forum  
 Christians Aware Interfaith Programme  
 Council of Christians and Jews  
 East of England Faiths Agency  
 Interfaith Foundation  
 International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)  
 International Interfaith Centre  
 Joseph Interfaith Foundation  
 London Society of Jews and Christians  
 Minorities of Europe Inter Faith Action Programme  
 Religions for Peace (UK Chapter)  
 St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation  
 St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society  
 Three Faiths Forum  
 United Religions Initiative (Britain and Ireland)  
 Westminster Interfaith  
 World Congress of Faiths

### Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme  
 Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, Heythrop College, University of London  
 Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations  
 Community Religions Project, University of Leeds  
 Institute of Jainology  
 Islamic Foundation  
 Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby  
 National Association of SACRE's  
 Religious Education Council for England and Wales  
 Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education  
 Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter  
 Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths

### Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group  
 Barnet Multi Faith Forum  
 Bedford Council of Faiths  
 Birmingham Council of Faiths  
 Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council  
 Blackpool Faith Forum  
 Bolton Interfaith Council  
 Bradford Concord Interfaith Society  
 Bradford District Faiths Forum  
 Brent Inter Faith  
 Brent Multifaith Forum  
 Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group  
 Bristol Inter Faith Group  
 Burnley Building Bridges  
 Calderdale Interfaith Council  
 Cambridge Inter-Faith Group  
 Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action  
 Cardiff Interfaith Association  
 Coventry Multi Faith Forum  
 Crawley Interfaith Network  
 Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group  
 Forum of Faiths for Derby  
 Dudley Borough Interfaith Network  
 Gateshead Inter Faith Forum  
 Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action  
 Greenwich Multi-Faith Forum  
 Harrow Inter Faith Council  
 Horsham Interfaith Forum  
 Hounslow Friends of Faith  
 Huddersfield Interfaith Council  
 Islington Faiths Forum  
 Keighley Interfaith Group  
 Lancashire Forum of Faiths  
 Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship  
 Leeds Faiths Forum  
 Leicester Council of Faiths  
 Loughborough Council of Faiths  
 Luton Council of Faiths  
 Faith Network for Manchester  
 Medway Inter Faith Action  
 Merseyside Council of Faiths  
 Middlesbrough Council of Faiths  
 Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  
 Moseley Inter Faith Group  
 Newham Association of Faiths  
 Newcastle Council of Faiths  
 Newham Faith Sector Forum  
 North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council  
 North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths  
 Northampton Faiths Forum  
 Nottingham Inter Faith Council  
 Oldham Inter Faith Forum  
 Oxford Round Table of Religions

Building Bridges (Pendle)  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
Portsmouth Interfaith Forum  
Preston Faith Forum  
Reading Inter-Faith Group  
Redbridge Council of Faiths  
Redbridge Faiths Forum  
Rochdale Multifaith Partnership  
Rugby Inter Faith Forum  
Sheffield Interfaith  
South London Inter Faith Group  
Southampton Council of Faiths  
Southwark Multi Faith Forum  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource

Swansea Faiths Forum  
Tameside Interfaith Network  
Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Group  
Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum  
Waltham Forest Faith Communities Forum  
Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network  
Warrington Council of Faiths  
Watford Inter Faith Association  
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group  
Westminster Faith Exchange  
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group  
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group  
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

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## **Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs**

In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit. The Inter Faith Network offers the following code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening these relationships.

As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs this means exercising good will and:

- Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions
- Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms
- Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence
- Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices
- Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict
- Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation
- Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances
- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices
- Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them

- Being straightforward about our intentions
- Accepting that in formal inter faith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected.

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone
- Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these
- Being sensitive and courteous
- Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power
- Respecting the right of others to disagree with us

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion harnesses deep emotions which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith to bring about reconciliation and understanding. The truest fruits of religion are healing and positive. We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values.

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